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Frontier Journalism

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Frontier Journalism

Few pioneers surpassed the newspaper editor as a trail blazer on the American frontier. The successful editor and publisher helped determine town sites, led in community affairs, and was the self-appointed guardian of the political, social, spiritual, and cultural growth of his neighborhood.

The first newspaper printed west of the Alleghenies was issued at Pittsburgh in 1786. A half century later John King established the first newspaper in Iowa at Dubuque — on May 11, 1836. At that time there were only 10,531 white people in the Black Hawk Purchase, in what is now eastern Iowa. During the next two years newspapers were established at Montrose, Burlington, Fort Madison, and Davenport. But most of these were short-lived. The first inland newspapers in Iowa were established at Iowa City and Keosauqua. By 1846 a score of newspapers had been started, but only half of these were being published when Iowa achieved statehood. Failure of subscribers to pay for their subscriptions and the inability of

editors to collect what was due them from advertisers were the two primary factors in the high rate of journalistic bankruptcy.

Between 1847 and 1849 sixteen newspapers were established in the Hawkeye State. Five of these — the *Northwest Demokrat* (Dubuque), the *Des Moines Valley Whig* (Keokuk), the *Iowa Freeman* (Mount Pleasant), the *Fairfield Ledger*, and the *Iowa Star* (Des Moines) — began publication in 1849. With the exception of the *Frontier Guardian* started by the Mormons at Kanesville on the Missouri River in 1848, the *Iowa Star* was Iowa's westernmost newspaper.

The honor of establishing the first newspaper in Des Moines must be given to Barlow Granger — a tall, slender New Yorker from Cayuga County who had set type with Horace Greeley, and who had literally followed that New York editor's advice — "Go West, Young Man, Go West." When Barlow Granger arrived at Fort Des Moines he found it a rough, unkempt village on the very cutting edge of civilization. It would take courage and resourcefulness to establish a successful newspaper at this frontier outpost. Barlow Granger, although awkward in appearance, rugged in features, and careless of dress, had the qualities necessary for such an enterprise.